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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the moral reasoning and perceptions of inmates in an eastern youth reformatory. A series of prison dilemmas, reflecting conflicts experienced by inmates and guards, was administered to 34 inmates; in addition, each inmate was given the standard Kohlberg moral maturity interview. Responses were scored for moral judgment and perception of moral atmosphere. Results indicate that the more primitive moral reasoning used in the prison dilemmas may be related to inmate perceptions of the moral atmosphere of the prison and that the traditional custodial prison fails to offer the inmate the conditions necessary to move him toward higher stages of thinking. The author feels that in order to substantially affect the inmates moral reasoning, communities must be provided that stimulate his moral thinking and are perceived by him as fair. Finally, the author describes an intervention to create such a correctional climate. (Author/SES)

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THE MORAL ATHMOSPHERE OF THE PRISON

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In this paper I will analyze the moral reasoning and perceptions of inmates in a youth reformatory in Connecticut. I will report results of inmate responses to dilemmas which pose moral conflicts occuring in prison. Inmate reasoning on these prison dilemmas was scored at a lower level for moral maturity than was reasoning by the same inmates on the standard Kohlberg dilemmas.

I will offer that the more primitive moral reasoning used on the prison dilemmas may be related to inmate perceptions of the moral athmosphere of the prison. Inmates tended to perceive the prison as operating at a stage one or two level of justice. I will suggest that the inmate's experience in the prison may have an effect on his long-term development. The traditional-custodial prison fails to offer the inmate the conditions necessary to move him towards higher stages of thinking. If we are to substantially effect the inmate's moral reasoning we must provide communities which stimulate his moral thinking and are perceived by him as fair. Towards this end I will describe an intervention to create a correctional climate designed to move inmates towards more mature moral thinking.

Procedure

The study was conducted in a custody oriented reformatory in Connecticut. Male inmates, aged 16 to 23 were confined under a strict and often rigid prison order. Inmated were closely regulated, movement was restricted and even minor offenses were punished by stern punitive sanctions.

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We developed a series of dilemmas which reflected conflicts experienced by inmates and guards. We were aided by inmates who offered us examples of conflicts which troubled them. One dilemma asked if an inmate should aid a young boy from his home town, who was being shaken down for cigarettes by some older inmates. Other situations forced inmates to take the perspective of the guards. They were asked if guards should punish inmates for such offenses as " fighting" or "sniffing glue".

The dilemmas were administered to 34 inmates chosen from Hickey's sample. An equal number of "experimental" and "control subjects were used. Due to transcription problems we were forced to use the post-experimental sample. In addition to the prison dilemmas each inmate was given the standard Kohlberg moral maturity interview.

The inmate responses were scored in two ways:

First, responses were scored for moral judgement. They were rated by the author using an issue scoring system. There was reliability check done with three other scorers. The combined major score agreement was 72⅔.

In addition to scoring for moral judgement, I qualitatively analyzed inmate responses for their perception of the "moral athmosphere". The moral athmosphere may be defined as the perceived level of justice of the prison. These perceptions were analyzed as initially independent of the inmate's moral judgement. Where the moral judgement expresses what the inmate thought one <u>should do</u> or what <u>should be done</u>, the perceptions of moral athmosphere related to what the inmate believed to be true of justice practises in the prison.

Results

The mean moral maturity score on the prison dilemmas was 242. The mean score on the standard dilemma was 267. The difference in means(25 MM points) were significantly different. At .05 level as measured by a Z test of deviations.(Z equals 2.6) (M.B. one stage equals 100 Moral Maturity points).

Seventeen inmates were scored as predominantly conventional moral thinkers (stages three or four on the standard dilemmas.)Of these eleven were scored as reasoning at a full major stage lower on the prison situations. All of the inmates scored as stage two thinkers on the standard dilemmas,remained at that stage on the prison stories. None of the inmates were scored as higher on the prison dilemmas than the standard dilemmas. It appears then that most of the stage three and four inmates tended to use lower stages of reasoning on the prison stories as compared with the standard Kohlberg situations.

To illustrate these differences in concrete terms, I would like to offer an example of an inmate who was sigificantly lower on the prison dilemmas. This inmate was scored as a mixture of stage three and four on the standard Kohlberg interview and as a mixture of stage two and three on the prison situations. When the inmate was asked on the kohlberg "Heinz" dilemma, ig he would steal a drug to save his wife who was dying of a strange form of cancer, the inmate responded:

Yah if wife was sick and it was the only way to get it. He had to do it. If he loves his wife he shouldn't care about punishment. The right thing in his mind would be to steal it. She is a human being and should be allowed to live. If it was a friend it would be the same thing. If the man has a chance to save somebody he should do it. If a person wants to live he should be helped to do so.

The inmates response to the dilemmas uses both stage three and four concepts of obligation. The obligation to help the dying wife depends both on a stage three role relationship and upon what sounds like a stage four rule that people who wish to live should be helped to do so.

In the context of the prison, obligation takes quite a different form. When asked whether he would help a young inmate from his twon, who is being shaken down for cigarettes, the inmate argues:

> People from your twon should be made to look "cool" If the guy is made to look like a punk, then the town looks bad, Its not so much the guy as the town. The older inmate will probably help the new inmate if he is stronger than the other guys. If he is weak, He'll just walk away and do nothing.

Obligation in the context of the prison rests on a stage three (or possibly two) notion of "making your town look good". This desire to make the town look good is however tempered by stage two instrumental concerns related to whether he is tougher than the other inmates. In the larger societal dilemma, the inmate was willing to sacrifice all for his dying wife. In the world of the prison, honor is subordinate to a kind of inmate realpolitic.

The issues of law and punishment yield similar differences between the standard and prison situations. In responding to a dilemma asking if a doctor who has committed Euthanasia should be punished, the inmate argues:

> They should take his practice away. He did break the law. He did wrong and can't be let off scott free. You have to tell him that he can't go out and do this and expect to get away with it. It was wrong to kill a human being. The law must be upheld.

The inmate's reasoning that punishment is necessary to uphold a stage four rule against killing is absent from his prison responses. In the context of the prison, the inmate finds almost all punishment illigitimate. When asked, for example, whether inmates should be punished for fighting, the inmate fails to connect punishment with any order maintaining fuction. He offers what appears to be a stage two or threee rejection of the need for punishment.

> Don't punish them. He didn't see nothing. It wasn't real bad. In this place a guy must stick up for his manhood. There should be punishment only in gang fights like when it's 3 to 1 or maybe 4 to 1. The four should be punished not the one. If there were no rules about fighting, there would be a lot of fights, but then later on things might qiet down, maybe.

Discussion

The question to be posed is why do inmates use arguments below their normal capacity while responding to moral conflicts in the context of the prison. Developmental theory suggests that inmates should prefer and spontaneously use the most reasonable arguments they are capable of comprehending.

In the prison dilemmas, it appears that inmates use reasoning more primitive than their highest stage of moral understanding.

Part of the explanation for this phenomenon lies in the inmate's perception of the prison's moral athmosphere. Inmates in the reformatory tended to perceive the prison largely in terms of lower stage catagories. They generally saw the prison as operating at a level of coercive-punitive force. ot alternatively at a level of instrumental-exploitation. This seemed true independent of the inmate's moral stage. Both pre-conventional and conventional inmates agreed as to the primitive relationship which dominated life in the prison:

Inmates tended to see relationships with other inmates in stage two instrumental terms. Inmates were seen as "ripping" each other off,"ratting" out their friends and "punking" weaker inmates. Relationships with other inmates were necessary for mutual protection, however they were usually seen as marred by "fronting". "Fronting" was necessary to defend one's interests and to "con" the guards and other inmates. The inmate world was to use Hobbes' term a "war against all." In this hostile state inmates saw no generally agreed upon norms, nor were there fixed standards which actively regulated transaction among inmates.

If relationships among inmates were largely perceived in stage two terms of instrumental exploitation, then the "justice" of the prison administrators was generally perceived as the stage one exertion of coercive power. Rules existed simply to "jam inmates". Punishments were inflicted to "get" particulat trouble-makers. The authority of the guard existed solely in his power to throw inmates in the puritive-segregation cell, known as the "box". Rules and punishment were seen as operating without standards, regularity or due process. The inmate saw himself stripped of political and contractual rights. One inmate when asked if he had any rights responded, "Yes, we can take orders".

The very purpose of the prison was questioned and ridiculed by almost all inmates. Inmates saw punishment as fulfilling instrumental needs of administrators. One stage four inmate suggested that the only reason that there were prisons was " to make jobs for guards,lieutenents and wardens. Inmates argued that there was no attempt to rehabilitate them in prison. The only effect prison had upon them was to"scare them into a superficial conformity".

Thus, the inmate perceived the prison generally in stage two or one terms. These perceptions may be related to the observed lower stage reasoning on the prison dilemmas. In the standard Kohlberg dilemmas stage three and four inmates were able to accept the moral legitimacy of larger societal roles and laes. In the context of the prison these roles and rules were perceived as illigitimate. Withour conventional support the stage three and four inmates tended to revert to instrumental stage two categories to resolve moral conflicts.

Implications of the Study

It seems plausable to suggest that the inmate's experience in the prison may have implications for his long term moral development: Kohlberg has indicated that higher stage reasoning, role taking and resolvable cognitive conflict are related to moral development. It might be noted that each of these variables were sorely absent in the reformatory environment.

Higher stage reasoning, for example has been associated with developmental moral change in both clinical and experimental studies. Subjects have been shown to move towards higher stages of thinking after exposure to systematic inputs of one stage above reasoning. In the prison there was but slight exposure to higher stage moral reasoning. Administrators

rarely offered to inmates the moral justifications for their decisions. These decisions typically were executed almost mechanically. High ranking officials would make a decision and bureaucratically impose it through formalized channels. The guard who implemented an order often had no understanding himself of the reasons for a particular rule. Rules were enforced with little articulation of their moral rationale.

A second condition for moral development was also clearly absent within the prison. The control-oriented bureacratic prison tended to block inmate participation in the justice making process. Kohlberg has argued that role taking and participation in the justice making process. Kohlberg has argued that role taking and participation in social institutions are related to individual moral development. "Justice" was administered to inmates by officials. Inmates were specifically "told to their own time, " in other words not to"become involved in prison affairs. Inmates were not allowed to "sit in on discipline hearings or participate in any kind of "political" activity. The effect of this blocking of involvement by the prison was to deny the inmate a role-taking experience in the maintenance process of the social institutions of the prison.

Finally, Kohlberg has argued that hetro_genity and norm conflict " in a spirit of attempted resolution" may be related to individual moral development. The prison tried to discourage all opportunities for inmates to engage in verbal conflict and discussion. Inmates who attempted to engage the staff in active dialogue about the validity of rules or practices were denounced as treouble-makers. Conflict among inmates,

especially where it involved political, cultural or racial differences was "suppressed for security reasons." The suppression of all social conflict meant that inmates were blocked from a kind of interaction which might be related to their moral development.

The prison's impoverishment in the kind of experiences which micht be related to individual moral development is common in most "traditional" custodial prisons. Joe Hickey, Lawrence Kohlberg and I are engaged in an intervention project which hopes to reverse this pattern of the fixation of inmate moral thinking at primative stages of reasoning. Working with female inmates at the Connecticut State Farm for Women we are attempting to implement a model cottage which will encourage inmate moral development.

The project has a number of components. First we will structurally reorganize the prison. We will move it from a centralized bureaucratic form of administration to an organization with functionally autonomous cottage units. Treatment and custodial staff along with inmates will create a rule and justice structure for the unit. It is hoped that through participation in rule creation and maintenace process, inmates will perceive the rules of the cottage as legitimate and fair.

We hope as well to effect the correctional ideology of staff members. We wish to offer the staff a correctional ideology based on moral developmental principles. Instad of treating the inmate as "behavior problem" or as "mentally disturbed" , this ideology will emphasize the goal of fair treatment as the end of the correctional process. This end will apply both to inmates and staff. As staff will be expected to treat inmates fairly and with respect for their rights, they will also insist that the inmate moves towards a just position in relation to other inmates, staff and society.

To achieve this goal of fairness, it is clear that we must be able to substantially affect the inmate's moral reasoning. A just community requires just people and this includes inmates. We hope through role-taking in the self-government process nad intensive small group work (as Joe Hickey has described) to provide a psychologically significant input into the inmate's moral thinking. There is reason to believe that the small groups run by Mr. Hickey in the youth reformatory were limited by the inmate's perception of the larger institution as arbitrary and unfair. The interaction of small group discussions with problems raised by living in a democratic community may provide far greater changes in inmate moral thinking than can be provided by discussion groups run in isolation. Through this moral community we believe inmate's moral thinking canbe significatly altered. We hope that this approach will provide both fair and equitable treatment for the inmate and will help move him towards a more reasoned understanding of social relationships.

Thank you